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ABSTRACT

A 1994 national survey of directors of 69 master's in business administration (MBA) programs gathered information on business language course offerings. Results indicate that while the issue of business foreign languages was of interest to administrators, their inclusion in the MBA curriculum was not widely supported. At present, about 80 percent of responding programs do not offer foreign language classes within the MBA program, and only 10 percent are contemplating adding them. However, there does appear to be an effort to provide students with the opportunity to develop language skills while in the program, by allowing students to take courses offered in the modern language department or contracting with outside agencies. Overall, directors' attitudes toward offering language courses were neutral, and their perception was that few faculty felt language courses were important to the MBA. Institutions offering a degree in international business were more likely than others to support language courses. Issues mentioned by respondents included how business language would fit into an already established program and how students could include them in an already intensive degree program. A copy of the survey and response data are apended. Contains 10 references. (MSE)

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FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN MBA PROGRAMS

A Report on a Survey of MBA Program Directors

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, graduate schools of business across the country have attempted to broaden the focus of their curriculum from one centered on solely domestic business topics to include international issues. As a result, many business schools are now offering or considering business language courses as additions to their programs. This paper was undertaken to discuss the current status of language courses in MBA programs and the attitudes of faculty and administrators towards this aspect of graduate business education.

A nationwide survey of directors of MBA programs was conducted in the Fall of 1994 to gather information as to the status of business language course offerings in their programs. The survey was designed to ascertain the approximate number of MBA programs offering these courses, factors influencing these course offerings, demand for these courses, and attitudes of the directors, faculty, and administrators towards such courses. This would hopefully provide for all interested parties at the graduate level an overview of the current status of these courses, demand, and prevailing attitudes.

As many graduate programs are facing the questions surrounding "internationalization" of the curriculum, it is hoped that the information gained through this survey may be helpful in ascertaining what is presently being done in this area and what the possibilities are for the future.

METHODOLOGY

A two page survey instrument consisting of eleven items was mailed to Directors of MBA programs of 109 institutions listed in the Graduate Management Admission Council's 1993-94 directory. Any international member institutions were excluded for purposes of this study, as the focus was on language instruction in U.S. programs only.

The GMAC list was chosen because it provided a good representation of the top graduate business schools in the country. Though the sample is relatively small, it does cover approximately 20 - 25% of the total number of business schools in the U.S. and does provide for demographic and geographic diversity.

The survey instrument consisted of eleven discrete items and a comment section. MBA directors were asked to provide information as to business language classes taught if any, plans for classes in the future, reasons influencing those decisions, student and recruiter demand for classes and language skills, and attitudes of the faculty and administration towards offering business language classes.

The survey instrument was sent to MBA Program Directors, (as opposed to Deans) because it was felt they would possess greater knowledge of curricular offerings and development due to their position. It was also felt they could fairly accurately assess both faculty and administrator attitudes towards language course offerings because of the interaction required in their position with both MBA program faculty and the school administration.

Of the 109 institutions surveyed, 69 responded, a response rate of 63%

RESULTS

Survey responses showed that indeed, the issues surrounding the offering of language courses to graduate business students were of current interest. This is evidenced by the unusually high response rate and the many requests by respondents for the summary results. It appears that as a part of the whole curriculum internationalization effort, faculty and program directors are assesing the role of language instruction in their programs, and the most efficient way of offering this to students.

Results indicate that 20 (29%) of the respondents were presently offering foreign language courses as a part of their MBA program. Thirty eight schools (55% of respondents) indicated that they offered either an MIB (Masters in International Business) degree or International Business concentration. Fifteen (39%) of those institutions offered language courses to their students,thus the majority of schools offering language courses were those which offered the MIB degree or concentration. None of the respondents required language courses in their present degree program.

Spanish, French and German courses are almost equally represented in the respondents' offerings. 19 institutions (28% of respondents) offer Spanish courses, 17 (25%) of respondents) offer French courses in their MBA programs, 16 (23%) offer

German, and 15 (22%) offer Japanese courses. 13 institutions mentioned offering Chinese courses. Respondents indicated that all courses were taught by modern language faculty as opposed to business faculty.

Seven (10%) of the respondents reported that they were actively considering language course offerings in their programs. When questioned as to the factors influencing that decision, the major factors appeared to be curricular fit and student demand. On a scale of 1- 5 (1 being most important) 20 respondents (29%) indicated curricular fit to be the most important factor in determining whether or not to offer language courses. Several respondents made additional comments in this regard that will be discussed later. Student demand was cited as the second most important factor, Placement efforts third, and financial reasons were cited as the least important factor in making that course decision.

The institutions were also asked about the percentage of recruiters at their respective institutions expressing a preference for graduates with foreign language skills. There was virtually no response. Most respondents indicated that that information was not available or they did not know or that it was not applicable in their situation. Those who did respond to that question indicated percentages anywhere between 10 to 75. Due to the extremely low response rate to that question and to the range of answers given, these responses were not taken to be valid. The low response rate could be due to the open ended design of the

question (respondents may have been more comfortable answering when given a specific range of percentages) or to the fact that MBA directors are not generally aware of that kind of information about the recruiting process. In any event, respondents did make an effort to indicate the specific language skills most requested by recruiters. On a scale of 1 - 6 (1: most mentioned; six: least mentioned) 11 (16%) indicated Spanish and Japanese as most requested. Seven (10%) cited Japanese as second, 9 (13%) cited German as third, Japanese was again cited as fourth most requested, and Chinese was cited as fifth by 7 respondents.

Responses inquiring about student demand for business language courses were a bit different. According to respondents,(using the same scale discussed above) Spanish was most requested by students by a large majority. Twenty one (30%) of respondents indicated Business Spanish as the language course most requested by students, with Business French second (10 respondents), German and Japanese next with 6 respondents each and and Chinese fifth with 3 respondents indicating demand for a Business Chinese course.

In addition to factual information about current or prospective course offerings, this survey attempted to assess the attitudes of the program directors, business school faculty, and administrators towards the inclusion of language courses in the curriculum. According to responses, attitudes towards offering Business language courses in the MBA curriculum were similar among program directors and faculty. When asked if they believed

Business Language courses to be an important part of the MBA curriculum, on a 1 - 5 scale (1: not important; 5: very important), the median response from program directors was 2.76, between somewhat important and neutral. The mean faculty response was 2.83, while the mean response indicating attitudes of the administration was 1.55. These questions were of course directed to MBA program directors so responses indicating faculty and administration attitudes were from the program director's viewpoint. It was felt, however, that the program director, because of his or her position was capable of accurately assesing the attitudes of both faculty and administrators. Taking into consideration that factor, these responses are thought to be reasonable.

CURRENT STATUS OF LANGUAGE COURSE OFFERINGS IN MBA PROGRAMS

It appears that a very limited number of MBA programs actually offer language courses as part of the MBA curriculum itself. As previously noted, only 20 out of 109 programs surveyed indicated that they provided those offerings. There is an even distribution demographically with half of those offering language being large state institutions, and approximately half being medium or small size programs.

However, a number of institutions indicated that they attempted to provide their MBA students opportunities for foreign language learning through other avenues. There were varied ways in which this was accomplished. Several schools (11) indicated that MBA students could take courses in the Modern Language

Departments of their institutions. One institution mentioned offering an intensive language program during the summer, and one institution indicated that they now contracted with Berlitz to provide language courses for the MBA's.

REASONS FOR NOT OFFERING LANGUAGE COURSES IN MBA PROGRAMS

Comments were received from several schools as to their reasons for not offering language courses. By far the most mentioned was that the MBA curriculum simply did not afford time to take any additional courses. One program director stated that he/she did not believe Business schools should be teaching language and another mentioned that English was the language of business (presumably indicating that it was unnecessary to attempt to learn or develop language skills). One respondent stated that recruiters rarely specified language skills among those to be sought.

CONCLUSIONS

Results of this questionnaire appear to indicate that, at present, most business schools are not offering foreign language classes in the MBA programs as such, nor is there a great rush to do so. In fact, only ten percent of respondents indicated that their institutions were seriously considering adding language courses to the program, not a large percentage. This concurs with results from Christine Uber Grosse and Geoffrey Voght's 1988 survey of modern language department chairs in which they concluded that "neither a bug surge nor a major reduction in

(LSP) course offerings seems likely".[1] However, there does seem to be an effort to provide students with the opportunity to develop and hone their language skills while in the program, by allowing students to take courses offered in the modern language department and even contracting with outside agencies.

From the directors' points of view, attitudes toward offering language courses in the curriculum are neutral at best, though 20% of them indicated that they personally believed business language courses to be an important course offering to be included in the MBA curriculum. They did not believe, however that the faculty felt the same as only 9% of the faculty was thought to feel that these courses were important to the MBA program. Institutions offering an MIB degree or concentration were more likely to offer these courses than institutions generally.

THE FUTURE

Respondents' comments and the number of respondents that requested results of this questionnaire, appear to indicate a definite interest in this issue on the part of business educators. From survey results and written comments, it seems that one of the biggest issues is the question of how these business language courses fit into the already established program, and the question of time available for students to

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[1]Grosse, Christine Uber and Voght, Geoffrey,"Foreign Languages for Specific Purposes in the United States", Modern Language Journal, 74,i, 1990, p.41.

include these courses in an already intense degree program. John Staczek addresses this issue in his article "A Case for the FL in the MBA and MIB" in the Journal of International Business where he states his belief that foreign language competency should be required for admission rather than focus on providing foreign language courses in an already crowded curriculum.[2] Schools are addressing this issue by making cooperative arrangements with foreign language departments, where students can take language courses in those departments for elective credit. Those may or may not be "business language" courses, as respondents did not specify, but only indicated that this opportunity was being made available. No one appears to be denying the benefits a language skill provides the student, only whether the course belongs in the business curriculum.

It seems difficult to believe, however, in this age of the global marketplace, that recruiters are not looking for those individuals with an additional skill that would be useful in this marketplace. And from the students' perspective, in this era of a tight job market, any effort to differentiate themselves from the crowd would appear to be of great value. In attempting to prepare the graduates for futures in the business world, it only makes sense to provide them with the opportunity to acquire every skill necessary to compete and succeed. Business schools have become very aware of developing international awareness in many

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[2]Staczek, John J. "A Case for the FL in the MBA and MIB", Journal of Language for International Business, 1, 1984, p.8.

functional areas and again, it seems a logical extension to offer these students a chance to develop specific language skills germaine to the business environment. Whether this is done through cooperation with the modern language dept. of their institution or through a stand alone course offered in the business school, the individual school must decide that based on resourses available. Historian Christopher Lasch in his final work, The Revolt of the Elites, states "Instead of generating a new appreciation of common interests and inclinations... the global market seems to intensify the awareness of ethnic and national differences. The unification of the market goes hand in hand with the fragmentation of culture".[3] If Mr. Lasch is correct in his view (and one may only look at the situation in former Yugoslavia), future businesspeople have an even greater need for cultural awareness and appreciation. There is no better way to "apreciate" culture than to learn its language, and no better way to ensure smooth, accurate communication than to be able to do so in your client's native tongue. Despite the pressures of an already full program, there still needs to be a place for students to develop (in most cases) already existing language skills and learn to use those in the business environment. That cannot help but provide business students, our future business leaders, an additional advantage in this changing environment.

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[3]Lasch, Christopher, The Revolt of the Elites , (New York): W.W. Norton and Company, 1995, p.93.

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- SURVEY -

1. Please indicate which languages are offered in your MBA program, how many semesters that course has been offered and whether the instructor is Business faculty or Mod. Lang. faculty.

	Yes	#Sem	Bus.	M.L.
Spanish	____	____	____	____
French	____	____	____	____
German	____	____	____	____
Japanese	____	____	____	____
Chinese	____	____	____	____
Other _____	____	____	____	____

	Yes	No
2. Is a foreign language course required?	____	____
3. If you do not presently offer foreign lang. courses in the MBA program, are such courses under present, active consideration?	____	____

4. Please rank the importance of the following factors in the decison to offer foreign lang. courses. (1: most important, 2: next important, etc.)

Financial	____
Curricula fit	____
Student demand	____
Job placement efforts	____
Other _____	____

5. Approximately what percentage of recruiters visiting your institution express a preference for graduates with foreign language skills?

____

6. Please rank language skills most desired by recruiters and courses most requested by students in the last year. (1: most mentioned - 6: least mentioned)

	Recruiters	Students
Spanish / Business Spanish	____	____
French / Business French	____	____
German / Business German	____	____
Japanese / Business Japanese	____	____
Chinese / Business Chinese	____	____
Other _____	____	____

7. Do you personally believe that Business Language courses are an important course offering to be included in the MBA curriculum?

Not important	Somewhat important	No opinion	Important	Very important
____	____	____	____	____

8. What is the attitude of the faculty towards this type of course offering?

Totally against	Not in favor	Neutral	In favor	Very much in favor
____	____	____	____	____

9. What is the attitude of the administration?

Totally against	Not in favor	Neutral	In favor	Very much in favor
____	____	____	____	____

	Yes	No
10. Does your institution have a MIBS (Masters in International Business Education) program?	____	____
or offer an MIB concentration?	____	____
11. Does your institution have a CIBER (Center for International Business Education & Research)?	____	____
12. Would you like a copy of the summary results?	____	____

13. Please make any additional comments concerning foreign language course offerings in your program or in MBA programs in general.

Name: _____

Institution: _____

Comments:

SURVEY RESULTS

Institutions offering language courses in the MBA program

Yes	Percentage respond.(%)	No	Percentage (%)
20	29	49	71

1. Which languages are offered in your MBA program?

Language	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Spanish	19	28
French	17	25
German	16	23
Japanese	15	22
Chinese	9	13
Other	4	

2. Is a foreign language course required in your program?

Yes	No
0	69

3. Are such courses under present, active consideration?

Yes	Percentage (%)	No	Percentage (%)
7	10	44	64

4. Factors influencing this course offering (1 - 5 scale, 1:most important - 5: least important)

	No. respondents	Percentage (%)
1. Curricula fit	20	29
2. Student demand	20	29
3. Placement	14	19
4. Financial reasons	25	36
5. Financial reasons		

6. Language skills most desired by recruiters (1 - 6 scale: 1: most desired - 6:least desired)

Language	No. respondents	Percentage (%)
1. Span./Japanese	11	16
2. Japanese	7	10
3. German	9	13
4. Japanese	7	10
5. Chinese	7	10

Business Language courses most desired by students (same scale)

1. Spanish	21	30
2. French	10	14
3. Fr./Ger./Span.	6	9
4. German	10	14
5. Chinese	14	20

7. Attitude of the director towards Business Language courses in the MBA curriculum (scale: 1 - 5: 1:not important - 5: very important)

Ranking	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.Not important	12	17
2. Somewhat important	26	38
3. No opinion	1	.01
4. Important	22	32
5. Very important	6	.09

Mean score: 2.76

8. Attitude of the faculty towards these course offerings (scale: 1 - 5: 1: totally against - 5: very much in favor)

Ranking	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1. Totally against	0	0
2. Not in favor	22	32
3. Neutral	27	39
4. In favor	10	9
5. Very much in favor	1	.01

Mean score: 2.83

9. Attitude of the administration

Ranking	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1. Totally against	31	45
2. Not in favor	38	55
3. Neutral	0	0
4. In favor	0	0
5.Very much in favor	0	0

Mean score: 1.55

10. Institutions with a MIBS program or an MIB concentration

Yes	Percentage (%)	No	Percentage (%)
38	55	31	45

Institutions with an MIBS program or MIB concentration offering Business Language courses

Yes	Percentage (%)	No	Percentage (%)
15	39	23	61

11. Institutions with a CIBER (Center for International Business Education and Research)

Yes	Percentage(%)	No	Percentage (%)
23	33	46	67

12. Demographic profile of those institutions offering language courses in the MBA program

10 Large state or private institutions (50% of those offering lang. courses)

10 Medium - small institutions (50% of those offering language courses)

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